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FM REO HILLAH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0661
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0647
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RUEHIHL/REO HILLAH 0712

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 HILLAH 000104

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/14/2016
TAGS: KISL PGOV PTER MARR IZ
SUBJECT: RUMBLINGS IN SOUTH CENTRAL PROVINCES

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CLASSIFIED BY: Douglas Meurs, Deputy Regional Coordinator, REO
Hillah, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Events in four South Central provinces over the last twenty-four hours indicate that although the incidence of terrorist acts remains low in this seemingly stable region, tensions are increasingly manifesting themselves in public demonstrations, ultimatums to provincial governments, and increasingly tense, sometimes violent confrontations. The Al-Hassani militia may be taking advantage of public dissatisfaction with local government to build up its strength, similar to moves by Muqtada al-Sadr in 2004. END SUMMARY

Qadisiyah Province: Sadrist to Governor - "We will Burn Down the City"

¶12. (S) An incident involving Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) personnel in civilian clothing escalated into public demands by the Diwaniyah Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS) for the release of "three gunmen" by Coalition Forces. Governor Hamza called REO staff on June 12, stating that the Sadrist will carry out their threat to "burn down" Diwaniyah if the three "detainees" are not turned over to the Iraqi Police by 1700 that day. OMS Sheikh Sadiq Al-Hasnawi told the press, "Diwaniyah will be the center of the first spark of public anger against the American occupation." He characterized the alleged release of the "gunmen" to Coalition Forces as evidence that "the Americans are supporting death squads in Diwaniyah."

¶13. (C) Throughout the afternoon and evening of June 12, Iraqi Police maintained a heavy presence in downtown Diwaniyah, including patrol cars using their sirens to dissuade public gatherings. Coalition Forces were also present downtown around the Provincial Government building. The situation was finally defused by the reported intervention of the Prime Minister's Office with OMS officials in Diwaniyah.

¶14. (C) Separately, up to two hundred members of Al-Sarkhi aka Al-Hassani, a rapidly growing "Twelfth Imam" militia demonstrated in downtown Diwaniyah on the same day. According to REO contacts, the group protested a lack of basic services, the gas shortage, and overall poor governance in the province. Al-Hassani may have marched as a way of distinguishing themselves from similar groups that condone wife swapping, alcohol, and drugs as a way of hastening the return of the "Twelfth Imam." Qadisiyah contacts tell us that the militia is aggressively recruiting new members. Warning flyers are going up in some Diwaniyah neighborhoods, associating Al-Hassani with the fringe groups. Contacts note that Al-Hassani appears

well-armed and well financed. In the June 12 demonstration, however, marchers did not carry weapons and wore white (a color that can sometimes signify willingness to commit suicide).

Karbala: Al-Hassani Moves Against Iranian Consulate

¶6. (C) On June 11, Al-Hassani members also attacked the Iranian consulate in Karbala, breaking windows. A local contact reported that the previous night, ten microbuses with Mahmoud Al-Hassani Al-Sarkhi supporters arrived in Karbala, parking by the "Husseinyat Al-Iman Al-Sadi" Mosque.

¶7. (C) Al-Hassani's militia members may have had several goals. The first was to make a public showing at the Al-Hussein and Al-Abbas shrines, probably to demand a larger percentage of donations. Al-Hassani had shown up at the shrines two weeks before with the same objective.

¶8. (C) On June 12, the Al-Hassani militia demonstrated in front of the Iranian Consulate to protest an Iranian television news broadcast (Al-Kawther) that announced that according to the Qom hamza, Mahmoud Al-Sarkhi Al-Hassani was neither an Ayatollah nor a religious authority. The broadcast also (correctly) noted that there is an Iraqi warrant out for his arrest. Consulate guards shot in the air to warn Al-Hassani off.

¶9. (C) COMMENT: Al-Hassani is probably the most anti-Iranian militia in the South Central provinces, in part because of Hassani's uncompromising stance against Ayatollah Ali Sistani and SCIRI as well as Mahmoud Al-Hassani's complicated, but undoubtedly competitive relationship with Muqtada al-Sadr. END COMMENT

Babil: Another Al-Sarkhi/Al-Hassani Demonstration and Mortar Attack Against REO Al-Hillah

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¶10. (C) On June 10, five hundred members of Al-Sarkhi/Al-Hassani publicly marched in Babil Province. Al-Hassani has not made a public demonstration in Babil in recent memory. Members wore white shirts, perhaps to distinguish themselves from the Mahdi Militia.

¶11. (C) On June 11, the REO was attacked for the second time in two weeks by indirect fire. Six rounds were launched in broad daylight against the compound. The REO had been under mortar attack since a single round in October, 2005. There are no suspects in the attack at this point. On the same day, a road clearing patrol out of Baghdad was hit by an Explosively Formed Projectile (EFP) outside of Hillah. Two wounded were medevaced from the REO. The attack is part of an overall intensification of incidents against CF in the region.

COMMENT: Al-Hassani Using Muqtada al-Sadr's Play Book?

¶12. (C) COMMENT: The sudden spate of public appearances by Al-Hassani militia members is reminiscent of Muqtada al-Sadr's followers marching in 2004 prior to the August uprising. While the degree to which Al-Hassani is conducting IED and other attacks against Iraqi Security Forces and Coalition Forces is unclear, it appears that the Al-Hassani militia is gathering strength and publicly flexing its muscles. As shown by events in Diwaniyah this week, the aggressive posturing of non-SCIRI militias is becoming a serious political headache for SCIRI-affiliated politicians in South Central Iraq. END COMMENT MEURS